

A European Survey of the Psychological Support given by NOGs to their Expatriate Staff

Humanitarian work has long concentrated on the material aspects of relieving suffering, often at the expense of the staff who are sent out to administer it. How are these human resources being managed today in Europe, at a time when emergencies are growing at an exponential rate, the NGOs are ever more numerous, and the competition between them often fierce, all resulting in a growing "humanitarian market" which is often slanted towards profit hiding under another name.

The present survey concerned all the problems which may result from inappropriate handling of the different types of stress incurred by aid workers, and it examined the ways that more than 100 European NGOs are using to support their expatriate staff. This covers how they brief their staff before departure to the field, what preventive structure if any has been adopted, and what reactions and forms of support are available during critical incidents; and last but not least, what kind of support in re-entry process.

This survey, carried out by the CHP and a team from the University of Geneva, revealed the existence of structures which were for the most part reactive, indicating an awareness, regrettably only partial, of the consequences resulting from the many factors of stress in the field. Although certain NGOs have a First Aid Psychological Support program which shows the beginnings of a general awareness of the problem, it appeared that none of those surveyed had a genuine understanding of the different types of stress, of their consequences, and of the available methods of coping with it.

This survey will be available in full in late January 2005.

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